

SUBCOMMITTEE ON NATIONAL SECURITY, EMERGING THREATS,  
AND INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

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## **Statement of Rep. Christopher Shays**

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Homeland security is an inherently intergovernmental undertaking. It demands unprecedented coordination and cooperation between people and organizations facing unfamiliar, even unthinkable, challenges. So the consolidation of twenty-two federal agencies into the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) was only the first, and perhaps easiest, step toward creation of a truly national capability to meet modern threats.

Now comes the hard part: integrating local, county, state and federal preparedness and response systems into a coherent, agile, mission-oriented whole.

DHS offices and functions are still strewn across the American landscape like scattered pieces of a jigsaw puzzle. First responders, mayors and governors calling for help need a thick Rolodex to find the DHS offices they might need. The Department inherited overlapping regional structures that do not reflect the high-level mission or the new realities on the ground. For example, the FEMA regional office for New England is in Boston, but the Connecticut communities I represent are closer to - and far more likely to be affected by - New York. In many areas, customs, immigration, Secret Service and Coast Guard offices are spread around the same city or very nearby.

Recognizing the need to keep the new Department's focus on this intergovernmental imperative, Chairman Ose authored the provision of the Homeland Security Act that brings us here today: the requirement that DHS develop a plan for consolidation and co-location of regional and field offices within its first year. This joint oversight hearing underscores our continuing commitment to build a Homeland Security Department that works from the ground up, not the top down.

The plan we received from DHS describes a process that could yield the cross-training opportunities and other synergies envisioned in the law. But it will take seven years or more to implement. Approaching this task as a pure lease management and facilities utilization exercise risks contorting the Department's critical missions to fit the space available. Mission should dictate structure, not the other way around.

A critical element of that mission is preparedness – local readiness to meet any hazard nature or man-made malevolence might conjure. The Department's day-to-day presence at the regional and local levels has to be structured to help communities build essential mitigation and response capabilities. That means standards, not the *status quo*, should drive the form and function of DHS service to its constituents and customers in the field. Under Secretary Hutchinson recently endorsed the early development of broad preparedness standards, and we look forward to working with him and his colleagues at DHS on that important effort.

As we will hear in testimony this afternoon, the DHS faces significant challenges reshaping its disparate elements into the finely honed tools needed against today's threats. But in that effort, the Department also has the opportunity to forge essential intergovernmental relationships. The right DHS regional structure could help bridge longstanding organizational and cultural discord between law enforcement, firefighters, emergency management and public health officials at all levels.

We appreciate our witnesses joining us today, and we look forward to their testimony.